

(Ret.), chairman, American Battle Monuments Commission.

Telephone Remarks to the Rolling Thunder Ride for Freedom

May 30, 2004

Thank you, Artie. It's great talking to you. I'm so pleased to speak to the members of Rolling Thunder as you attend the annual Ride for Freedom. I want to thank you for your leadership. You might tell them, Artie, that it was my honor to host you in the Oval Office—you and Mike Cobb and Gary Sheffmeyer and Jay Fairlamb and other special guests. I really appreciated you coming by to say hello.

I also received a letter from you last week, if you know, Artie. I thought you were going to offer me riding lessons—turned out you offered me Rolling Thunder's national endorsement for my reelection, and I want to thank you for your support. I'm really proud to have you stand by me—and the membership.

But more importantly, I appreciate the tremendous service that the members of Rolling Thunder perform on behalf of our veterans and active duty Armed Forces. I'm not surprised you're doing such good work because, like you, Artie, most are veterans. You understand the definition of sacrifice.

This weekend, as you mentioned, is Memorial Day, a day we honor the memory of the heroes who have fallen in battle. And I want to thank you for recognizing that, Artie, and I want to thank your vast membership for recognizing that as well.

I'm also calling to thank you because for 17 years you've worked to see that our war veterans are remembered, returned home, and reunited with their families. I know that your work and your persistence and your diligence means a lot to relatives all over our country who wonder about their loved one—the fate of their loved one. In the Oval Office, I looked you in the eye as you told me about your relentless pursuit of finding out the plight of many of our POW/MIAs, and I appreciate so very much your concern, your care, and your persistence.

I also want to thank you and your organization, Artie, for honoring the men and women of our military who fight today in Afghanistan and in Iraq. You and I know—both know that they're carrying out this mission, a mission which will make America more secure and the world more free, with incredible courage and compassion and skill.

I am proud to be the Commander in Chief of these brave Americans. I will do—I will always honor their service. I will do everything in my power to ensure that they and their families receive the gratitude and respect of our great Nation.

It's a high honor, Artie, to serve as President of this great country. I work every day to be worthy of that honor. And I'm calling to tell you how much I appreciate the great faith you and your organization have placed in me by endorsing me for a second term.

Ride safe. May God bless you. May God bless your families, and may God continue to bless our great country. Thanks a lot.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:40 p.m. from the Residence at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Artie Muller, president, Mike Cobb, chairman of the board, Gary Sheffmeyer, vice president, and Preston B. "Jay" Fairlamb, second vice president, Rolling Thunder, Inc.

Remarks at a Memorial Day Ceremony in Arlington, Virginia

May 31, 2004

Thank you all very much. Thank you all. Welcome. Mr. Secretary, thank you for your great leadership as Secretary of Defense for our country. General Myers, members of the United States military, veterans, honored guests, and fellow Americans. This morning I had the honor of placing a wreath before the Tomb of the Unknowns. This custom is observed every Memorial Day on behalf of the American people as a mark of gratitude and respect.

And when this ceremony is concluded and all of us have gone on our way, the Honor Guard will keep watch over the Tomb. Every hour of every day, on the coldest nights, in the hardest rain, there is a sentinel of the 3d U.S. Infantry standing guard. The soldiers entrusted with that duty count it a privilege.

And today, as we reflect on the men and women who have died in the defense of America, all of us count it a privilege to be citizens of the country they served.

In the military tradition, no one is left behind on the field of battle. And our Nation is determined to account for all of the missing. The same spirit can be seen in the respect we show to each life laid down for this Nation. We receive them in sorrow, and we take them to an honored place to rest. At this and other cemeteries across our country and in cemeteries abroad where heroes fell, America acknowledges a debt that is beyond our power to repay.

This weekend, we dedicated the World War II Memorial, which will stand forever as a tribute to the generation that fought that war and the more than 400,000 Americans who fell. Some here today can turn their minds back across 60 years and see the face of a buddy who never made it home. You are veterans who have not forgotten your comrades, and America will always honor the achievements and the character of your brave generation.

Through our history, America has gone to war reluctantly because we have known the costs of war, and the war on terror we're fighting today has brought great costs of its own. Since the hour this Nation was attacked, we have seen the character of the men and women who wear our country's uniform. In places like Kabul and Kandahar, in Mosul and Baghdad, we have seen their decency and their brave spirit. Because of their fierce courage, America is safer; two terror regimes are gone forever; and more than 50 million souls now live in freedom.

Those who have fought these battles and served this cause can be proud of all they have achieved. And these veterans of battle will carry with them for all their days the memory of the ones who did not live to be called veterans. They will remember young soldiers like Captain Joshua Byers, a West Point man born in South Carolina who died in Iraq. When this son of missionaries was given command of a 120-man combat unit, he wrote this to his parents: "I will give the men everything I have to give. I love them already, just because they're mine. I pray with all my heart that I will be able to take

every single one of them home safe when we finish our mission here."

Sergeant Major Michael Stack, who was laid to rest at Arlington, wore the uniform for 28 years and is remembered as a soldier's soldier. The sergeant major must have been quite a guy. When he was a young platoon sergeant, the recruits gave him a nickname, No Slack Billy Jack Stack. *[Laughter]* By all accounts, he was the kind of man you want in charge of a tough situation. And by the account of his mother, he finished his good-byes with these words: "Mom, I'm going because I believe in what I am doing. And if I don't come back, we will meet in a better place."

Those who risked their lives on our behalf are often very clear about what matters most in their own lives, and they tell it to those they love. Master Sergeant Kelly Hornbeck of the Special Forces was killed in action last January, south of Samarra. To his parents back in Fort Worth, Texas, he wrote this: "I am not afraid, and neither should either of you be, for I trust in my God and my training, two powerful forces that cannot be fully measured."

After Private First Class Jesse Givens of Springfield, Missouri, was lost last May, his family received a letter he had written to them in the event of his death. He wrote this to his son, Dakota: "You've taught me that life isn't so serious, and sometimes you just have to play. You have a big, beautiful heart. Through your life, you need to keep it open and follow it. I will always be there in our park when you dream, so we can play." To his wife, Melissa, Private Givens wrote, "Do me a favor after you tuck the children in. Give them hugs and kisses from me. Go outside and look at the stars and count them. Don't forget to smile." This is the quality of the people in our uniform.

And this is the loss to our Nation. Markers on these hills record the names of more than 280,000 men and women. Each was once or still is the most important person in someone's life. With each loss in war, the world changed forever for the family and friends left behind. Each loss left others to go on, counting the years of separation, and living in the hope of reunion.

Although the burden of grief can become easier to bear, always there is the memory of another time and the feeling of sadness over an unfinished life. Yet, the completeness of a life is not measured in length only. It is measured in the deeds and commitments that give a life its purpose. And the commitment of these lives was clear to all: They defended our Nation; they liberated the oppressed; they served the cause of peace. And all Americans who have known the loss and sadness of war, whether recently or long ago, can know this: The person they love and miss is honored and remembered by the United States of America. May God bless our country.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:24 a.m. in the Amphitheater at Arlington National Cemetery.

Remarks to the White House National Conference on Faith-Based and Community Initiatives

June 1, 2004

Thank you all for coming. Thank you all. Please be seated, thanks for coming. Thank you so much.

I want to thank you all for caring about your country enough that you are here to inspire others as to how to save lives. Welcome to Washington, DC. I want to thank Tonja Myles, the director of Set Free Indeed, from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, for introducing me. Tonja is—when I talk about people involved in saving people's lives, I'm speaking about people like Tonja and those on the stage with me. You heard their stories. I have too. And on behalf of a grateful nation, I thank them and you for serving in the army of compassion.

By feeding the hungry, by healing the addicted, by loving and caring for refugees, you represent the true strength, the real strength, the genuine strength of the United States of America. And I am grateful for what you do.

We're here to talk today about the relationship between people of faith and Government policy. I believe it is in the national interest that Government stand side by side with people of faith who work to change lives for the better. I understand in the past, some in Government have said Government can-

not stand side by side with people of faith. Let me put it more bluntly, Government can't spend money on religious programs simply because there's a rabbi on the board, cross on the wall, or a crescent on the door. I viewed this as not only bad social policy—because policy bypassed the great works of compassion and healing that take place—I viewed it as discrimination. And we needed to change it.

So we've hosted regional conferences to raise the issue. I try to talk about the Faith-Based Initiative a lot. Part of my job is to say to the American people, "Here is a fantastic opportunity to help America become what we want it to be, a land of hope and promise and love and compassion."

And so we're—and we're having regional conferences like this. I'm proud to report that we've reached more than 10,000 faith-based and community groups with the message that we want your help, that the Federal Government now welcomes your work, and do not fear being discriminated against by the Government.

Listen, I fully understand there are people in the faith community who have said, "Why do I want to interface with the Federal Government?" [*Laughter*] "Why would I want to interface with a group of people that want to try to get me to not practice my faith?" It's hard to be a faith-based program if you can't practice faith, and the message to you is, "We're changing the culture here in America."

And we're making progress. We're changing the attitude here in Washington, DC. I want to thank the Cabinet Secretaries who are here. It should indicate to you that my Cabinet not only has gotten the directive from the President that I expect all Cabinets to be open to faith-based programs, but it should speak to the character of the people who I've called to serve the country. Secretary Ann Veneman, Elaine Chao, Rod Paige, Tony Principi, thank you all for coming today. Hector Barreto of the SBA and Andrew Natsios of USAID, thank you all for coming. I see the Justice Department is represented by Deputy Attorney General Jim Comey. Thank you all for coming. This is a—HUD is represented.